

Plan to Decentralize U.S. Government Termed Outmoded in H-Bomb Era

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The plan to disperse government facilities to the suburbs was valid in the age of the A-bomb but is outdated in the era of the H-bomb, Elizabeth Rowe, chairman of the National Capital Planning Commission, said yesterday.

Mrs. Rowe was responding to protests by Maryland planners against the so called 1985 Plan, an NCPC proposal that would, among other things, concentrate future construction of Federal build-

ings in Washington rather than the suburbs.

A draft of the 1985 Plan, completed in September, is being circulated for comment by local and regional officials.

The Maryland group — the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission — sees a conflict between the 1985 plan and a policy statement prepared four years ago by NCPC for regional development by the year 2000.

The Year 2000 Plan envisaged a 2-to-1 ratio of Federal construction favoring the sub-

urbs. It looked toward development of a string of communities clustered about government facilities spaced along corridors radiating from the central city.

1985 Plan Reverses Ratio

The 1985 Plan, which involves Washington alone, reverses this ratio, foreseeing the bulk of Federal construction in the downtown core as a stimulus to revitalizing the city proper.

The Maryland planners said that if the 1985 Plan becomes a reality it would cripple their efforts over the past several years to plan the suburbs according to the satellite city concept.

Mrs. Rowe said the 1985 Plan is not so much a reversal as a change in emphasis.

"The Year 2000 Plan was drawn just at the end of the dispersal period that followed the atom bomb scare," she said. "With the advent of the H-bomb it was realized that dispersal was not practical. The pressures to move the establishment from the point of view of continuity of government were not there anymore."

Refers to Truman Policy

Mrs. Rowe was referring to a policy established during the Truman Administration to disperse government facilities to lessen the crippling impact on the Federal function of an atomic attack on Washington. The development of the H-bomb, with its immensely

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wider range of effectiveness, led to a gradual abandonment of this policy.

The NCPC now feels, Mrs. Rowe said, that the day to day work of the Federal Government can be carried out more efficiently in the central core. Moreover, a centralized government establishment would reverse the drain on the city's population by attracting more people to live close to the center of employment.

Mrs. Rowe's version of the philosophy behind the Year 2000 Plan was disputed yesterday by William E. Finley, former director of the NCPC, who quit in 1963 in a policy dispute with the chairman. Finley was the chief architect of the Year 2000 policy.

"The dispersal argument is ridiculous and has no merit," said Finley, who is now planner for Columbia, Md., a new town to be built in Howard County. "The H-bomb was known about in 1950 and by 1959 there was no active policy of dispersal of Federal employment."

"The Year 2000 Plan" rejected any civil defense considerations. It was based on two concepts: that continued concentration of Federal facilities in the city would result in a dead city at night, and that it was important to limit the number of people commuting into the city. It was felt it was not good for Washington to have more than a certain share of commuters who don't come here to shop or buy.

'Changes Percentages'

"We felt it was important to place Federal buildings along the corridors in order to germinate new center of activity. Mrs. Rowe doesn't really believe in growth of new communities along corridors."

Mrs. Rowe said, however, that the 1985 Plan "doesn't preclude Government development in the suburbs. It just changes the percentages."

She noted further that the 1985 Plan is limited by statute to the D.C. border and is not a regional plan. Therefore, while the two are related, the 1985 proposal is necessarily concerned with the basic interests of the city. A second draft of the 1985 Plan in March will contain a section on the city's relation to the suburbs, she said.

Meanwhile, Virginia planners had mixed reactions to

the 1985 proposal yesterday. Walter Schilling, planning director of the Northern Virginia Regional Planning and Economic Development Commission, said his group is "quite concerned" with the new plan.

'Changes the Rules'

"Washington, D.C. sits down to follow its own outline and changes the rules," he said. "We in Virginia have gone ahead to fulfill the basic premises of the Year 2000 Plan, presuming that the ratio (of suburban-city Federal employment) would stay the same. I'm to write up a report with our reactions in several weeks' time and we hope certainly hope they will take our comments seriously."

Harriet Bradley, Fairfax County Supervisor and a former planning official, defended the basic ideas of the 1985 Plan. "You shouldn't go overboard and put too much outside the central city. If it's going to be a vital place, it's got to be a busy and crowded

place. Otherwise you can't upgrade the downtown area, and the Nation's Capital deserves upgrading."

Mrs. Bradley said she would like to see the ratio revised, however, to provide more suburban government jobs than envisaged in the 1985 Plan.

Further support for the

NOPC plan came yesterday from Downtown Progress, a corporation that is seeking to revitalize the central city.

Downtown Progress said in a statement it "agrees completely with the basic policies set forth for the Downtown area, between Pennsylvania Avenue and M Street, from the White House to the Capitol."